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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2006

In Today's Papers

Turkey-EU Ties Following EU Leader Summit

All papers: At a summit meeting in Brussels, EU leaders ratified a December 11 decision by European foreign ministers to suspend talks with Ankara in eight of 35 policy areas. EU leaders agreed to discuss the isolation of Turkish Cyprus at an EU meeting on January 12. The next EU term president, Germany's Angela Merkel, told the Greek Cypriot leader Tassos Papadopoulos that she was determined to implement a regulation adopted in 2004 for direct trade with the Turkish Cypriots. Papadopoulos reportedly agreed with Merkel that Turkish Cypriots could use the Greek Cypriot ports such as Limassol in the south for their exports. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso told the Italian daily La Stampa that in addition to the Cyprus issue, Turkey must do more with regard to religious freedom, free speech, the rights of women and minorities, and the impact of the military in politics.

Papers report British Prime Minister Tony Blair will stop over in Ankara on Friday before going on a tour of Middle Eastern countries including Egypt, Israel and Palestine on Saturday. Blair will meet his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan at dinner on Friday to discuss the EU's suspension decision, Cyprus and the Middle East.

Meanwhile Mesrob II, the Armenian Patriarch in Turkey, sought support for Turkey in a letter he sent to 23 EU leaders. "The EU reforms have improved the basic rights of Turkish nationals including religious minorities," Mesrob II said, adding "This positive process will continue." "Since the 1920s, Turkey has turned its face to the West," he stressed, urging the EU leaders not to derail membership talks by imposing one-sided conditions, "without taking into account Turkey's other commitments."

The economic/political daily Referans claims that the Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) has been working on a new plan concerning ties with the EU, which envisages cutting dialogue with the European bloc on some issues, downgrading the level of contacts with EU

representatives and using Turkish veto powers in NATO. The paper thinks Turkey might cut off dialogue with the EU on energy and illegal migration issues. The EU desperately needs to diversify its energy resources to avoid natural gas dependency on Russia. Turkey, however, might opt for cooperating on energy with Russia, not with the EU, according to Referans.

Kamuran Ozbir, commenting in the nationalist Ortadogu, urges EU leaders to show vision: "The Greater Europe project, with the addition of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU, has proven its success. Even though the EU has 27 members, most likely four others will follow -- Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Serbia. That brings the EU to the borders of Turkey and unfortunately there is no consensus on that subject. Even the European press is now admitting that Cyprus is not the genuine issue as far as Turkey-EU negotiations, but it is only a pretext for excluding Turkey. When the current potential conflict areas are seriously considered, it is obvious the value Turkey brings for its position between the Western world and the Islamic world. If the EU leaders make their decision without thinking of only Turkey's membership as the issue, but in terms of establishing a bridge between the two worlds, they will prove to be global actors with vision. Otherwise the EU will remain within its confined borders. The upcoming events will demonstrate the quality of the EU vision."

Turkey-Israel Project of Black Sea-Red Sea Pipeline

Under the headline, "The Project of the Century," Radikal carries an extensive front-page story reporting that Turkey and Israel have agreed to establish a pipeline to link the Black Sea to the Red Sea, carrying Russian and Kazakh oil to Far East markets. The multi-purpose pipeline will also carry natural gas, electricity and water, benefiting also Jordan and Palestine. Turkish Energy Minister Hilmi Guler and the Israeli Infrastructure Minister

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Binyamin Ben Eliezer agreed in Jerusalem yesterday on an immediate launch of the project, for which the feasibility work is expected to last six months. A 550-km pipeline, with a capacity to carry 60-70 million tons of crude annually, will be constructed in early 2007 linking Samsun and Ceyhan. The project to be completed in 2009 is estimated to cost USD 1- 1.5 billion dollars. Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, a key terminal in the project, will become an export route for the Russian and Kazakh oil to be transported through Israel to India, China, Japan and other Far East countries. Israeli Prime Minister Olmert is expected to visit Ankara in the coming weeks to discuss the project, and the official agreement between the Turkish and Israeli governments is to be signed in mid-2007, says Radikal.

Iraqi Sunni Groups Secret Meeting in Istanbul

Cumhuriyet and Yeni Safak reported that a conference to support the Iraqi people was held in Istanbul this week. Representatives of Iraqi Sunni groups attended the meeting, which started three days ago in Istanbul. Papers speculate that the meeting might spark some trouble for Turkey's Iraq policy since some radical Sunni groups reportedly participated at the meeting. Initially, the meeting was planned for the same time as Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki's visit to Turkey. However, Maliki rejected the plan and threatened to cancel his trip to Ankara if the meeting coincided with his visit. Therefore, the meeting was held one month after his mid-November visit.

Writing in the mass appeal Vatan, Rusen Cakir warns of the dangers in seeking a sectarian-based solution for Iraq: "In the US there are two different views prevailing on the Iraq issue. One group tends to believe that civil war is Iraq's own business, suggesting that US forces should only focus on operations against Al Qaeda elements and training Iraqi forces. The other group suggests that the US should take a side in the civil war and favor the Shiites. But there is also a fear within this group of creating an Iraqi Shiite state which would benefit Iran. There is no pro-Sunni group in the US, at least not one speaking out. Thus some Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia are forcing Washington to make a choice. For that very reason, it would be wrong to characterize Turkey as a Sunni Muslim country, as it was in the ISG report. If Turkey finds itself in the midst of a sectarian debate, Ankara will gain nothing but will be

thrown into a boiling pot. Fortunately, there is still some hope for finding the right approach. Former Democrat administration figures like Madeleine Albright stood up and warned the administration not to shape a policy based on sectarian lines. Let's wait and see how President Bush shapes the new Iraq policy and how it will play in the Democratic-led Congress. The fact of the matter is that there are very few names as wise as Albright."

Early Election Debates

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Yeni Safak, Cumhuriyet and others: Debates over election timing are high on Turkey's agenda. The opposition parties and the President are pressuring for early elections, and AKP officials reject these calls sharply. Speaking to NTV, Justice Minister Cemil Cicek said that early elections will only be a waste of time. AKP Deputy Group Leader Salih Kapsuz, in an attempt to respond to all critics, said yesterday that in a time when Turkey needs economic and political stability it is not right to try to stir things up by talking about early parliamentary and presidential election. Kapsuz added that President Sezer forgot the fact that the parliament that elected him was overthrown by the people. The opposition parties continued their criticism of AKP and pressured for early elections. Yesterday, CHP Deputy group leader Kemal Anadol, expressing support for President Sezer, said that no one has the right to determine the next seven years of the country, adding that the next president will be a people's leader not the AKP's. ANAVATAN leader Erkan Mumcu, in a written statement late on Wednesday, said that "parliament should first discuss the presidential election system before early general elections. The president should directly be elected through a popular vote in two

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rounds."

TV Highlights
NTV (6 a.m.)

Domestic News

- Some 250,000 public servants, members of the labor union KESK, launched a nationwide one-day go-slow strike at hospitals, tollbooths, schools and tax offices. A couple of thousand state employees staged protests in Ankara demanding pay hikes and better living conditions. Traffic on the Bosphorus Bridge was jammed for hours yesterday because of a slowing down of work by employees at the tollbooths.
- The Turkish Parliament has overridden the veto of President Sezer, approving a controversial land protection bill that is seen as a regulation favoring US food giant Cargill operating in the province of Bursa.
- Turkey and Jordan will participate in search and rescue exercises to be held in Israel on December 17-21.
- The Turkish Parliament has approved a bill banning the development, production and stocking of chemical weapons.
- A draft bill allowing foreign doctors to work in Turkish hospitals has sparked heated debates between the Justice Ministry and Health Ministry.

International News

- The Economist speculates the Turkish military might intervene in northern Iraq in spring. Last July, Prime Minister Erdogan had asked President Bush for support to contain "hawkish" Turkish generals.
- Iranians will go to the polls Friday for local council elections that are expected to be a first test of support for hardline President Ahmedinejad.
- Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya reached the Gaza strip late Thursday after Israel closed a border crossing to block his return from a money-raising tour of Arab states.

- The FBI said in a bulletin the "blind sheik" who inspired the World Trade Center bombing has been hospitalized, raising fears of new attacks if he dies in US custody.

- On Thursday, South Korea's Ban Ki-Moon took the oath of office as the next secretary-general of the UN, promising to restore the organization's tarnished reputation and push for peace in the Middle East and Darfur.

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